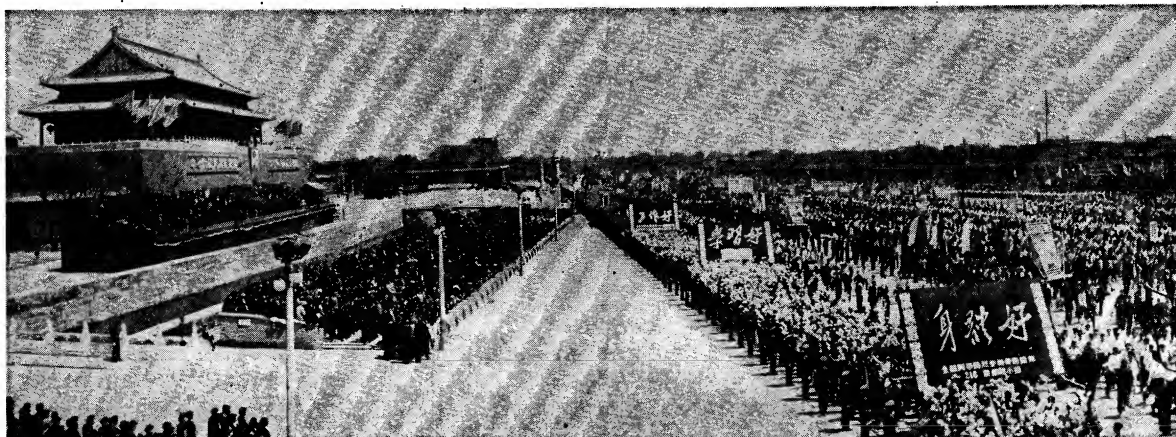


Prospects for Red China



Communist China's Disciplined Millions Challenge the Free World
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Just one month ago, the latest dynasty to rule over China celebrated the fifth anniversary of its establishment in Peking.

What are the prospects for this regime? What do its leaders envisage as their objectives? By what means do they hope to achieve them? What problems do they face? Is Peking likely to launch a major war?

Obviously, no complete answer to these questions can be furnished from this side of the Bamboo Curtain. But from available sources, Communist and non-Communist, a reasonably coherent picture emerges.

The Soviet Model

Peking's domestic course over the next 10 years is clear enough. The top leadership seeks to repeat on the Chinese scene the pattern of domestic transformations carried out by Stalin in the early 1930's, with a specially urgent emphasis on the establishment of a Chinese industrial base for the maintenance of its modernized armed forces. It seeks simultaneously a related goal: to increase the independent authority of Peking in Asia within the limits permitted by the need to maintain the Sino-Soviet alliance and by the resource requirements of the industrialization program. For the moment, where internal and external ambitions conflict (or are made to conflict by an effective free-world policy), the present leadership in Peking is likely to accord priority to expansion of its domestic power base.

Unlike that of the Soviet Union in the pre-Communist period, was not adequate to insure a large exportable surplus. Moreover, China lacks the timber and gold which the Soviet Union could throw in as its grain export capabilities declined under the impact of collectivization and population increase.

The Chinese Communist regime's problem is thus essentially more difficult than Stalin's, and success is not assured. Much hinges on the course of agricultural output and, especially, on the peasant's productivity response to the regime's grain-control and collectivization measures. A repetition in China of the 20 per cent fall in agricultural output which marked the first Soviet five-year plan would constitute a disaster—not to the Chinese people alone, but to the regime's ideological pretensions, and probably to its control machinery and unity as well.

Internal Crisis?

Although it is plain that there will be continuing and probably increasing strain between the regime's doctrines and ambitions on the one hand and its human and material resources on the other, it would be foolhardy to forecast a major crisis. All that we can see now is that, given a convergence of certain conditions, such a crisis is possible. It may be useful, therefore, to outline very briefly an extreme case.

The regime is committed to a policy of agricultural mobilization sufficient to cover a set of key requirements: minimum peasant consumption, urban needs, projects demanding mass use of labor, military and all official needs, and exports.

The regime is prepared, up to a point, to regard the food supply left to the peasant as residual; that is, it is prepared to balance its books, as in 1953-1954, with starvation on a considerable scale—but well short of major crisis.

Nevertheless, a rising population in the face of an agricultural output either static or decreased by unfavorable peasant response or natural disaster, would immediately raise serious questions.

To what extent should rural starvation be accepted in lieu of reduced allocations to other categories? How much starvation over what period would crack the morale of the cadres and the peasant-born army? At what stage would a cutback in foreign trade and investment be accepted in place of starvation?

And, in the extreme, what would happen if a population increase and accelerated urbanization should so tilt up the Chinese economy that the regime would be confronted with the choice of unacceptable levels of starvation or a virtual abandonment of its further development plans? These are questions of quantity and degree; and it should be strongly emphasized that an extreme crisis which would pose them all cannot be forecast on present evidence. Such a definitive crisis could come about only as the result of a process lasting for several years, not as a consequence of a single poor harvest season.

With this in view, it is still not impossible that, if the regime persisted, might yield a major crisis, for

all are to some extent present or possible in the Chinese scene:

1. A sharp fall in the death rate.
2. A disproportionate rise in the urban population.
3. An adverse productivity reaction of the peasantry to the regime's agricultural policy, yielding static or declining output.
4. A relative neglect of agricultural in favor of industrial investment.
5. A succession of bad harvest years.

Roughly speaking, it could be said that the fulfillment of Peking's current objectives requires something like a 10 per cent increase in agricultural output over the 1952 level by, say, 1957 to 1959; and that a 10 per cent fall in output from the 1952 level, if it persisted for several years, could generate a decisive crisis.

Such a crisis would not be merely a domestic affair. Its existence would constitute a demonstration that the Soviet model is inappropriate to the Chinese (and Asian) scene; and that the network of ties to the Soviet Union failed to carry China over the hump into sustained industrial growth.

In such an extreme setting, the leadership might well split and Peking's international orientation as well as its domestic policy come under reexamination in the course of subsequent years.

Thus, while emphasizing the fact that a decisive crisis on the mainland cannot be firmly forecast, it can be said with confidence that one critical test of the regime over the next several years will lie in its ability to move toward its announced goals in the face of China's fundamental problems of overpopulation and low agricultural productivity, by techniques which violate the peasant's incentive to produce.

Changes at Top

What changes can be expected to take place in the top leadership of the Communist regime over the next decade should crisis or major war be avoided?



At the moment, the top leadership represents a continuity stretching back to the earliest days of Chinese Communism. This homogeneous group of individuals, now mainly in their 50's, will continue to control the Chinese Communist regime over, say, the next decade whether or not Mao Tse-tung himself survives, and to remain unified and fairly impervious to change until the 1960's.

The passing of Mao Tse-tung, who is now in his early 60's, would undoubtedly remove the most powerful, most unifying personal force. But the regime has already begun to lay the foundations for collective leadership in public doctrine and, quite possibly, in administrative practice.

As we look ahead, however, the inevitable process of wholesale replacement, whether gradually prepared for or occurring over a relatively short period, could have significant meaning. The older leaders like Chu Teh, Lin Tzu-han, and Tung Pi-wu, who now lend great prestige to the regime and still exert influence on policy, will presumably have passed from the scene or will be without real power.

The same holds true for the famous military veterans, the very core of Mao's strength and of the unique Chinese Communist administrative system, all but, possibly, Lin Piao, who is only 46—and Lin is thought by some to be already seriously incapacitated.

By 1965 the elders may well be Chou En-lai, Lin Biao, Peng Chao, Chen Yun, Peng Teh-hsiang, and Hu Yaobang. There is only one full-scale military man here—Peng Teh-hsiang.

There is a sizable group of Communist Party veterans in their 40's; and there have appeared in recent years important new leaders, like An Tzu-wen, Lai Jie-yue, and Hu Yaobang, who seem to be without any known history of distinction in the Chinese Communist movement and to have moved suddenly from the regional periphery to the power center. Here is the material of future leadership—a mixture of what we might call second-generation veterans whom we recognize at least in part and of newcomers just beginning to show.

There is little to be said about the newcomers except that they are likely to be different from the veterans. They are likely to have had their training in conventional military units, rather than guerrilla operations. They will be more expert in staff work, logistics, and the handling of modern equipment than Chu Teh and his colleagues who now run the Chinese Communist armed forces.

The politicians will be experts at the bureaucratic manipulation of organized instruments of power, administrators rather than experts in the politics of insurrection.

If present modes of education and criteria for promotion persist, the next generation will be heavily laced with engineers, industrial managers, and planners. In short, we can expect, slowly or suddenly, a transition in Communist China similar to that engineered by Stalin in the Soviet Union in the 1930's. It is still a decade, however, before this new generation emerges and bids for (or inherits peacefully) the posts of command.

China and Free Asia

Peking is not merely engaged in a struggle with its own basic problems, its people, and its culture; it is in a competitive race with free Asia—the evolution of a communist society in China will be profoundly affected by the course of events in free Asia; and the full success of the Chinese Communist regime depends in part on what happens over the next decade in free Asia.

The Chinese Communists came to power essentially because in only alternative regime available was weak in the field, ineffective in administration, and, to many, unattractive. In a larger sense the meaning of what Communist China accomplishes or fails to accomplish will be measured against the strength and attractiveness of free Asia's performance.

In the short run, however, military success can be an effective political substitute for domestic performance. Regimes which are achieving international success seldom break up in their period of expansion. Free-world military weakness in Asia could thus strengthen the prestige and power of the Peking regime within China and cushion the consequences of a mediocre domestic performance.

Direct military aggression by the Chinese Communist regime is not to be ruled out. Nevertheless, it appears evident that the regime wishes to avoid a major war, and that it intends to pursue its ambitions for expansion in Asia by a mixture of political aggression with limited military actions which minimize the risks of major war and which cost little in resources.

We can count on a determined effort to complete the conquest of Indochina. Incipient operations in this style may be in the making, directed in concrete results to the northern provinces of India, Burma, and, perhaps, Indonesia.

The Chinese Communists hope to link such direct pressures on the Asian states to more conventional political efforts to pose as the leading power of Asia and as the repository of the hopes of approach to Asia's great problems of overpopulation and agrarian poverty.

The effectiveness of such a program of quasi-military aggression and political posturing obviously hinges on the military and political performance of free Asia.

If Japan is left to wallow along from year to year in the trough of a chronic balance-of-payments crisis; if the Philippines fail to attain a concrete, results in the economic and political promise of Magsaysay's political success; if India remains indolent and distracted; if the Far East fails to produce major results from its effort at a democratic renaissance; if the United States fails to develop both as a creative element in free Asia and a political rallying point for a new China; if Asia's political and economic situation does not substantially improve its performance, an indifferent outcome on mainland China would still represent an important relative achievement both to the Chinese and to Asians generally.

On the other hand, the evolution of solid military, political, and economic policies in free Asia could deny Peking its claim to military and ideological primacy in Asia, and help force, over time, a reevaluation of the Chinese Communist regime's domestic and foreign policies.

Conclusions

Looking ahead, the Peking regime's continued stability can be said to depend fundamentally on the following four interrelated factors:

1. The policy and performance of Soviet Russia. Moscow must continue to deny itself direct intervention in Peking's internal-control system, and Moscow must avoid an internal Soviet crisis that would gravely weaken Soviet strength on the world scene. A weak Soviet Union would force a reappraisal by Peking of the lean-to-one-side policy, as would an attempt to extend Soviet strength into Peking's domestic power machinery.

2. Competition with free Asia. Peking must persuasively maintain its posture as Asia's wave of the future, both in terms of military strength and, especially, as possessor of the "correct" formula for the solution of Asia's problems. Peking's ability to do this lies largely in the hands of the free world: in free-world actions and policies, and in the image the free-world impresses on the thinking of Asia's citizens.

3. The economic problem. Peking must achieve industrialization, without excessive starvation, in the face of China's underlying problems of overpopulation and low agricultural productivity. This outcome hinges on the balance between measures to increase agricultural output and the human response of the peasantry to collectivization—with the harvests an important random variable.

4. Top leadership unity. Unity and continuity must be maintained in the top leadership of the regime, a problem which is likely to hinge in the foreseeable future more on the success of Peking's substantive internal and external policies and the leadership's continued agreement on them, than on personal or bureaucratic struggles for power within Peking's control structure.

All this is said on the assumption that major war will not come. The question arises: Is Peking likely to launch a major war—for example, by pouring its ground forces south into Burma, Thailand, Malaya, and Indonesia, taking the risk that would be involved, as the Japanese did in 1941?

For the moment such premeditated military aggression seems unlikely. Peking's leaders have a strong sense of history. They see China in a tactically strong position, but without the strategic underpinnings for independent major-power status. For the moment their main purpose is to concentrate on the establishment of the industrial and military foundations for major-power status. They are not in the mood for reckless military adventure which would risk their hard-won base of power in China.

But it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the determination of the cost of military adventure to Peking is a matter of the free world's strength, unity, and will. Communism is never a self-containing phenomenon.

What are likely to be Peking's intentions in the face of limited unilateral conflicts? Peking is likely to press its interests coolly and ruthlessly by political shrewdness and weakness. It will abandon no positions cheaply, but will assay the real power position it confronts in the mixed political-military balance of the Yalu and Manchuria was so judged in 1950, Peking is likely to fight to the limit.

If the regime is confronted with the choice of postponing the achievement of its external ambitions or of facing either major war or operations costly to industrialization, it is prepared to postpone its expansion in Asia.

But if confronted with a situation which would seriously endanger the regime's hold on its domestic base (and in the context of Sino-Soviet relations the United Nations advance to the Yalu and Manchuria was so judged in 1950, Peking is likely to fight to the limit.

This, then, is the phenomenon that confronts the West. A unified, confident, ambitious group of men deeply committed to the use of totalitarian techniques has mastered mainland China. These are men driven on by their internal and external ambitions to industrialize rapidly and to expand the modern world's power base.

They face, in the coming years, a decisive passage of modern history at a time of intense power struggle in which they are caught up two ways: in the Sino-Soviet alliance, and in the interaction of China and the rest of Asia.

Thus, despite the unique powers the Communist regime exercises on the mainland, its fate rests substantially with the peoples of the free world and their governments.